

FORGETTING GOD**NO. 2975****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1906****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1876***“Therefore have they forgotten me.”**Hosea 13:6*

OUR text reminds us that God does take notice of what men do, or of what they do not do. Here He complains—and there is a kind of mournful plaintiveness about His words—“Therefore have they forgotten me.” It is not a matter of indifference to God whether men remember Him or not. It seemed to be a subject of surprise to David that God should think of man, for he wrote, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?” Yet God is mindful of man and it grieves Him that man is not mindful of Him.

It would not disturb our minds if one tiny ant should forget or ignore us, yet we did not create it, and we have not the claims upon it that God has upon us. Yet, little though we are—and so insignificant that the ant itself is a great thing in comparison with us if we reckon what we are in comparison with God—it seems that He does want us to remember Him, to think of Him, and to trust, and love, and serve Him, and when we do not, He is vexed and grieved.

At least, speaking after the manner of men, we are taught to believe that it pains Him at His heart, so that He cries out by the mouth of His servant the prophet, “They have forgotten Me—their Maker, their best friend, and their greatest Helper.”

I am afraid, dear friends, that the accusation in our text may be brought against a very large number of us. Certainly it can be laid to the charge of all those who have lived without thinking of God, and who have never turned to Him with repentance and faith, and who, consequently, are still strangers to Him. How many such people there are, God alone can accurately compute, the great mass of our fellow creatures would come under that category.

But worst of all, among the Lord’s own people there are, alas! some against whom this accusation can be brought. They have forgotten their God—not absolutely, so as to be utterly and altogether like the thoughtless sinner, yet very sadly and grievously, so that God Himself complains of them, “They have forgotten me.” For mark you, if God observes what ordinary men do, much more does He take notice of what His own people do.

An unkind word from a stranger may have a very slight effect upon us, but if such a word should come from the lips of one whom we love, it would cut us to the quick. We could put up with a thousand things from those who are mere acquaintances, but from a beloved child, or from the wife of our bosom, such a thing would be very hard to bear.

Remember, O Christian, that ancient declaration, “The LORD your God is a jealous God.” Because He loves us so much, He is in that very proportion jealous, for the greatest jealousy grows out of limitless love, and the Lord our God who bought us with the heart’s blood of His dear Son, counts us so dear to Him that a wandering thought in our mind becomes a crime against Him, and the giving up of any part of our heart to love of the world, or of self, or sin, or Satan, or any other of His rivals, becomes to Him a cause of grief and sadness.

If there are any children of God here—and I fear there may be many—who have grown cold in heart, and who have wandered from the Lord, I hope the text will come like a lament from Him who hung upon the cross of Calvary, “Therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore have they forgotten me.”

I. I am going to call your attention first, to THE TIME WHEN THIS SIN WAS COMMITTED.

“Therefore,” says the Lord, “have they forgotten me.” When was that? If we ascertain that, we shall also find out when we ought to be most upon our guard against falling into a similar sin.

It appears, dear friends, to have been when the Israelites had come out of the wilderness into Canaan—*when they had escaped from troubles, and had come into an easy condition*, for so the context reads, “I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.”

It is a very sorrowful fact that in this case the greater God’s goodness was to His people, the less was their gratitude to Him, just in proportion as He was kind to them, they were cold to Him. These people had been delivered from excessive toil. In Egypt they had been a nation of slaves, and in the wilderness they had been for forty years pilgrims with weary feet. They seldom tarried long in any place, but backwards and forwards across that “waste howling wilderness” they marched almost continuously, and concerning all that time God says, “I did know thee in the wilderness.” He knew them, morning by morning, as the manna fell. He knew them when the quails came on swift wings to bring them flesh to eat. He knew them when the morning and evening lambs were offered in sacrifice for them, sinners as they were, all the while they were in the wilderness and He says, “I did know thee then.”

So, brethren, it has happened to some men that when they have had hard times, long hours, and stern labor, they have managed to be up in the morning early to get a quiet season of communion with God, and though they scarcely could have been thought capable of doing it, for they worked so hard, yet they could find leisure to teach a few children in the Sunday school, or to distribute tracts, or to speak a word for Christ at an open-air service.

They had very hard bondage in their daily occupation, yet whenever there was a weeknight service, they always managed to get there. They were very apt to fall asleep when they sat down in the pew, out of sheer weariness because they had been toiling so hard during the day, still, they said that half a loaf was better than no bread, and they were glad to get a message from any of the Lord’s servants in those trying days.

But dear friends, you remember that in due time, the children of Israel came to Canaan. Then there was no more marching to and fro in the wilderness for them. They found houses built ready for them to occupy, and they could sit every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and then it was that the Lord said, “They were filled, and their heart was exalted; *therefore* have they forgotten me.”

It is just the same with the man who used to come to the house of God Sabbath days and weeknights, though he was sorely weary with his heavy work. He has what men call “an easy berth” now, and has very little to do, so, being no longer a poor galley slave tugging at the oar, you might have thought that he would have given more time to God’s service, and have become one of the most industrious Christians living, instead of which, he does not do as much now as he used to do with the fag ends of time which his hard toil allowed him.

Ah, brethren! when you get into smooth and easy places, then is the time when you should be most anxious lest of you, as of the Israelites, the Lord should have to say, “Therefore have they forgotten me.” I would fain wish for every one of you that you may be able to earn your daily bread without any excessive labor. I would that every man, who has to toil beyond due and reasonable hours, were delivered from such semi-slavery, yet I know that there are many who make an ill use of any leisure that they get, and some who are not nearly as fervent in the cause of God, now that they have leisure, as they used to be before they were so privileged.

These Israelites, also, were now *delivered from the pressure of urgent want*. At the very beginning of their wilderness journey, they had to go for three days without water. “And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.” They cried to Moses, “What shall we drink?” and he cried to the Lord, and soon the bitter waters were made sweet. Before long, they had eaten up all that they had brought with them out of the land of Egypt, and they murmured again, and then the Lord gave them a daily supply of manna, their bread dropped from the sky morning by

morning. But now that they have got into Canaan, that have broad fields that are very fruitful, they reap abundant harvests, their barns are full to bursting, and the hillsides are clad with vines, and olive trees, and fig trees, and all manner of dainties. Instead of having to gather one day's food at a time, they have many months' supplies laid up in store. Some of them became very rich, but alas! it was of them that the Lord had to say, "According to their pasture, so were they filled...*therefore* have they forgotten me."

You must have known or heard of men and women, who have loved the Lord when in poverty—or at least, who have seemed to do so—and who were very fervent and active while they had to look up to the Lord from day to day, and pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," but in the order of God's providential dealings, they have been lifted up into another station in life.

You would naturally have supposed that they would have loved the Lord more, and have done more for His cause, and laid themselves out with a greater alacrity for His service, but instead of that, it has been the very reverse with them. When they were financially poor, they were spiritually rich, but now that they are financially rich, they are spiritually poor. As they have gone up temporally, they have gone down spiritually. Their barn has become full, but their heart has become empty. Their wine press has overflowed, but the joy of the Lord has departed from them. It is a sad, sad thing wherever this happens, some of us know that it often happens. Let it not be so with any of you, beloved.

Then again, *these Israelites had become very self-indulgent*. They enjoyed themselves and lived only for pleasure, and they despised everybody who would not or could not do the same. Being "rich, and increased with goods," they looked down upon those who were not rich, and worse than that, they began to forget their God.

O my brothers and sisters, I have often looked upon those who have been in sore trouble, and I have wished that, by some magic touch, I could lift the daughters of sorrow out of their sad state, but I have lived long enough to feel that if I could do it, I would deliberately stay my hand until I had consulted with infinite wisdom to know whether it would be for their good or not. If it were in my power to lift the cross from every brother and every sister's shoulders here, and to give all of you your heart's desire, I would not do so, however much I might feel prompted to do it.

As I see how often the plant that bloomed in the shade, is burnt up in the sunshine—and how some natures have never yielded the sweetest perfume except in grief's sad dripping-well—when I perceive that some of God's saints never seem to honor Him when they are lifted up into high places—I feel that you and I had better be satisfied to let the Lord put His people wherever He pleases, and keep them on "short commons" sometimes, and even chasten them every morning, as the psalmist says was done to him.

Perhaps some of them, if the Lord did not make them cry every morning, would make themselves cry twice as much before night, and if He did not afflict them, they would very soon bring far worse afflictions upon themselves by falling into some great sin.

I think I know the reason why God does not trust some of us with the bright eye and the elastic step which He bestows upon others. I think I can see why He does not give some of us more prominent positions in His church, and greater influence amongst the works for Him. I think I can tell why that sister is lame and that brother is blind, why that one hangs her harp upon the willows, and that other toils amid continual poverty.

It is because God will not risk all His ships on the roughest seas. He has constructed some of His vessels so that they can stand the storm, and these He sends away into the thick of the tempest, but His little ships He keeps nearer the shore. Some of His seamen see less of His wonders in the deep because they are not able to bear the sight as others can. I think it is so, and certainly, this is true—that seasons of prosperity, of any sort, are seasons of great trial to Christians. According to our text, it was at the time of their prosperity that the Israelites forgot their God.

II. Now secondly, let me indicate THE PROGRESS OF THIS EVIL WHENEVER IT HAPPENS TO A MAN.

It has happened that *some men have lived all their lives forgetting God*. It may be that some of you who are here at this service, have never really thought of God, you have forgotten all about Him.

A gentleman was walking down a country road one Sabbath morning and he met a man with a cartload of hay, he was asked by the man who was driving the cart whether he had seen two lads on in front. "Yes," said the gentleman, "I have, and I think they are the boys of a father with a short memory, are they not?" He said he did not know whether it was so or not, but they were his lads. "Well," said the gentleman, "I thought that you were their father, and that you had a short memory, for you do not seem to have recollected that there is a text of Scripture which says, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.'"

That short memory concerning the Sabbath affects a great many people concerning everything else that is good. Some of you, I fear, have such short memories that you have never even recollected the God who made you. You have eaten just as the cattle eat, and you have drunk as they drink, but you have never blessed the Giver of the unnumbered mercies that you have received, any more than the cattle have done.

Some of you go on from morning to night without any recognition of God. There are hundreds of men who might be compared—as Rowland Hill did once compare them—to hogs under an oak. "They eat the acorns," said he, "but they never look up and thank the oak." They live in this world, and feed upon the bounties which God has provided for them, yet they have no thought of Him. It is His air that they breathe, and it is by His power that they breathe that air, they could not exist for a single moment if it were not for Him, yet He is not in any of their thoughts.

If God were blotted out of the universe—if such a thing could be, that He should no longer exist, but that they could still exist, they certainly would not be grieved, possibly they would feel all the easier in their mind because there would be no judgment to come, and no punishment for all their ill doing.

Ah, my friend! you must be in a very bad plight if you think you can get on better without God than with Him. If your boy were to say concerning you, "I wish I might never see my father again"—if that little child who eats at your table every day, whom you clothed but the other day with new garments—if he were to say, "I never want to speak to my father again, I wish he were dead"—there must be something radically wrong in that child, his morals must be thoroughly bad. Even if nobody has ever found him out in thieving or lying, I am sure, from that one fact, that he is a bad boy.

Now, my friend, even if I cannot point to any sinful act of yours, I am sure that there must be something very wrong with you if you have lived in this world all these years without thinking of God.

If I am invited to go and stay with a friend in the country, and I simply see his beautiful park and his fine gardens, and indoors I receive all that I want in the way of refreshment during the day, and a comfortable bed at night, but my host never puts in an appearance, and I do not know whether he is anywhere about the premises—I do not enjoy my visit. I came down to see *him*, so I cannot be content with seeing his park and his gardens, and so on. I say to the servants, "Where is your master? I came down here to pay a visit to him, and I cannot find any pleasure here unless I see him."

And dear friends, I feel just like that with regard to my God. When I look at this beautiful world which He has made—and it is a beautiful world, after all, let who will speak against it—I always feel that I want to see Him who made it. Even our lovely gardens, which seem to me to be a thousand times more beautiful than all the vineyards of the Continent, would give me no pleasure in looking at them unless I could always realize that God is there. The sea itself—the wide and open sea—what is it if there is no God to rule its waves, and to speak in its storms?

I must see traces of God in everything that happens, but some of you have lived all this while, and God's cry concerning you—over hill and dale, up and down the street, in the house where you live, across the table at which you eat, and over the pillow on which you sleep—is, "They have forgotten Me. I have made them, kept them alive, and blessed them in a thousand ways, yet they have forgotten Me—Me, of whom they ought first to have thought, for it was essential with them that they should first have thought of Me, and through not thinking of Me they have bred within themselves all manner of evil."

O unconverted people, I wish you could put yourselves in God's place for a few minutes, and just think how you would feel if others had treated you as you have treated Him! Let the sharp arrows of conviction stick fast in your conscience as you realize that you have acted in a mean, dastardly, ungenerous, ungrateful way towards your God—the tender, loving, gracious Creator, Preserver, and Friend of men.

But now, turning to you Christian people, I want to ask of the progress of this evil in you. I will show you how it often works. When God prospers you in business, and takes away sickness, and removes causes of sorrow, it sometimes happens that *the evil of forgetting God begins with an almost imperceptible alienation of heart from Him*. You do not notice it, you would be very grieved if you did, but your heart begins to grow cold, and the love to your Lord that once burned in your soul, is not as fervent as it used to be, and this condition of spirit very speedily shows itself in increasing fondness for worldly things.

To have riches may be a blessing to you, but for the riches to have you, must be a great curse to you. There are some who have abundance of temporal things given to them, and they make a good use of them, so they may be thankful for them, but there are others who are carried away by these temporal things, which thus become the source of all sorts of calamities.

A man may have a fine house and a beautiful garden, and he may be thankful for them, so far, so good, but he may fall into the sin of making a heaven of that house and garden, and so they will be the cause of sin. He may be wealthy, and that will be a good thing if he uses his money aright, but by and by, he may begin to feel that the one thing worth living for is to have money, and that will be an evil. If you have acquired a certain amount of money, and you feel that you are a person of importance simply because you have so much wealth, you are putting earthly things into the place which God alone should occupy.

As old Master Brooks says, it is as when a husband, whose wife used to dote upon him, has given her rings, and chains, and other ornaments, and now that she has them, she dotes upon them, and forgets him. It is very sad when this is the case, and it is often so with some who profess to be the Lord's. If we accept His gifts as tokens of love from Him, and see Him in them, than they are helpful, and not hurtful, but when we get to thinking of them, and not of Him, then they become mischievous to us.

This is an evil which continually grows, for *this man, who is beginning to mind earthly things, keeps on indulging himself*. He takes more of what he calls pleasure than he used to do, and indulging himself thus, he gets into a wrong state for prayer, for searching the Bible, for attending the means of grace, and the more he enjoys this world, the less does he think of the next world.

As the things that are seen eat like a canker into him, the things that are unseen seem to lose their power over him. If he still attends the place where he went aforetime to hear the Gospel, he says that the minister does not preach as he used to do, and the singing is not as lively as it used to be. Other Christian people say that they cannot see any difference at all, but he can.

You know, dear friends, what is very often the difference between one dinner and another. It is not the fault of the cook, it is the want of an appetite. Here are some brethren who have lost their spiritual appetite. They cannot eat this, and they cannot eat that, and they cannot eat the other. They have lost their appetite, that is the reason. "To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet," says Solomon, but this man, who has prospered in the world, and has had much enjoyment in it, is now beginning to lose all relish even for those very spiritual things that were once the delight of his soul.

So he begins to drop off coming to the house of God, and gradually declines, first a little in this way, and then in that. He has more money now than he used to have, so it takes him a longer time to count it. He has more business than he used to have, and it takes more time to look after it. He cannot come to weeknight services, and if, on the Lord's-day, for appearance sake, he does not cease going to the place of prayer, he carries his ledger with him in his carriage—metaphorically, if not literally. There is many a man who comes into his pew with acres of land hanging to his boots, and there is many a woman who

sits there in a fine new dress—not only the one she has on, but the other one that is to be made up on Monday.

It is sad when worldly things then get into the soul, and come right into God's house. Why, the preacher himself knows what it is to find a thousand distracting thoughts come to his mind while he is addressing you, and therefore he knows that they must come to your minds while you are listening to the Word of the Lord. Thus it happens that in one thing after another, the love of God and His Word withers, and the love of the world grows.

By and by, family prayer gets pushed into a corner—very short, and not very sweet, and private prayer hardly knows where to find a place for the sole of its foot. Private prayer, as there are none but yourselves to note its observance, is a very convenient place for retrenchment. You want to save time, as you have so much to do, and therefore you snip off a piece here, and another piece there, and who but God is the wiser? You do not yourselves perceive any very great difference, for your conscience is getting seared.

So, by degrees, a Christian who is declining in spiritual things, gives up private prayer—not altogether, perhaps, but the sweetness and the enjoyment of it depart as he trifles with it, instead of entering into the holy exercise with all his heart and soul.

In some professing Christians, this declension goes further still. *At last, they give up all religious profession.* I wonder whether there is any man here who once declared, and probably believed, that he was a Christian, but who has now given up even the name of Christian. If so, my friend, one of two things is true concerning you—either you never were converted at all, and so have been a mere professor, or else, if you ever were truly converted, you will have to come back again.

As surely as ever the Lord looked upon you with an eye of love, you must come back to Him, for after He has once set His seal upon you, He cannot and will not let you go. Oh, that you would come back to Him now! You will have to come back, poor wandering sheep, for you belong to the Good Shepherd who will not lose one of His flock. Wayward as you are, He will have you with Him, and if you will not come back to Him when He calls you, He has some rough dogs that will worry you back, but back from the paths of sin you must come, and I pray God that you may come back right speedily, and so once more enjoy the blessings of peace with Him.

I sometimes pass persons who used to sit in these pews and who were, I thought, ardent Christians. Even now, some of them have respect for me, but I fear that they have none for my Master. If I get anywhere near them, they slink away, for fear I should speak to them. I wish they had as much anxiety about the grief they have caused my Lord as they have about any grief they may have caused me. May God grant, through His sovereign grace, that all of us who have professed to be His, may be preserved, lest—

*“When any turn from Zion's way,
(Alas, what numbers do!)”—*

we also should turn away, as we shall certainly do unless His grace shall hold us fast!

III. Now thirdly, and very briefly, a few words about THE PECULIAR EVIL OF THIS SAD CONDITION, “They have forgotten me”

It is *so grossly ungrateful* that every Christian who realizes that he is apt to slide into such a condition, should at once bestir himself and watch against it. What! shall I love the Lord less because He gives me more? Shall I set the gifts which His goodness bestows upon me, upon His throne, and let them be idols to deprive Him of my heart's love and worship? If I do this, surely I shall be worse than the brute beasts. God grant, dear brethren, that we may be ashamed of such a condition as this, and fly from it!

Remember that if any of us do begin to set our hearts upon the things of this world, *whatever we gain, we must be losers.* The man who has scarcely a rag to cover him, but who delights in God, may be the *beau ideal* of a happy man, but the man who is robed in purple, and who calls an empire his own, but

who has forgotten his God, is to me the model of misery mocked by majesty. God save you from being able to delight yourselves in anything but your God! May He put so much bitterness into every other cup that you will be compelled to take the cup of salvation, and calling upon the name of the Lord, to drink only of that! You will be dreadful and eternal losers, whatever else you gain, if you lose the Lord.

If you forget God, you who are indeed His children—and I am speaking only to such people just now—it is a terrible thing for you to be led into a condition in which you forget your heavenly Father. If there were a wife who was very poor, but who, as long as she was poor, clung to her husband, and found all her delight in his love, but who, when they became rich, no longer cared for him, it would be wretched riches that could turn away her heart from him who ought to possess it all. If I love my brother and find great comfort in fellowship with him, but I should suddenly get to be so great that I should not know my brother, what a miserable being I should be!

Many a man does not know his own relations when he begins to get rich. He thinks he is somebody of importance, but really he is a big nobody—a very great and dreadful nobody, and when a man, just because God prospers him, does not know Jesus Christ, his great elder Brother, and gets to be ashamed of mixing with God's poor people who go to the little Ebenezer Chapel, or of being seen with those poor commonplace sort of Christians who try to follow the Lamb whithersoever ever He goes—he is a poor, poor specimen of a man, much less of a Christian man. God give us minds and hearts quickened by His grace, that will enable us to live above all such meanness as that!

A sad part of the wretchedness of this condition is that *it involves so much trifling with God*. If we have forgotten God, dear brethren, we have forgotten the many deliverances we have had in the days that are past. We have forgotten the wiping away of our tears of sorrow. Worse still, we have forgotten the precious blood of Jesus, that spoke peace to our soul, and we have forgotten the Holy Ghost, who came into our hearts and gave us joy and rest in Jesus Christ.

And if we have forgotten God, we have forgotten His gracious promises which are yet to be fulfilled, and the glorious covenant of His grace, ordered in all things and sure, on which our hopes of heaven are based. We have also forgotten His claims upon us—forgotten that we are His children, His beloved, His elect, His redeemed. We have forgotten all that, and we are living in such a condition that we are trifling even with His threatenings. He has threatened that He will chasten us, and we seem to make light of His threatenings and to defy His chastisements. We must have gotten into a state that is piteous and lamentable to the last degree if we can live from day to day in forgetfulness of God.

IV. I will say no more about this sad decline, but finish my discourse by telling you HOW THIS EVIL CAN BE CURED.

If any of us, brethren and sisters in Christ, are suffering from this dreadful decline, *it is a good help towards its being cured when we see the mischief of it*. When a man has this sad condition pointed out to him, and the Spirit of God enables him to see it, that is a great help towards lifting him out of it. But I think that the best thing for us all to do is, just for the moment, to sink all differences, and not ask any questions about whether we are saints or sinners—whether we ever did love the Lord, or whether we did not, and *let us all go straight away to the cross, just as if we had never gone there before*.

By nature, and by practice too, we are all guilty, and we all deserve to be cast into hell—the best of us as well as the worst. So let us all go where the Savior carried the great load of sin upon Himself, and bore its consequences, that He might set us free from it forever. Let us look up to Him, and by faith, view the flowing of the blood from those many wounds that He received on our behalf.

Let us look into that dear face of His—the image of matchless misery and majesty combined, let us note the thorn crown, and all the marks of ignominy and shame that cruel men put upon Him. Let us hear Him cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and as we see Him die, let us believe in Him again, or believe in Him for the first time.

My Savior, my Redeemer, wherever I may have wandered, I come back to Thee. My soul believes in Thee, trusts Thee, hangs all her hopes for time and eternity upon Thee, wilt Thou not speak peace and

pardon to my guilty spirit? Ah, if you come to Him with such a confession and cry as this, you will get your love back again.

The best place to get it back again is the place where it was born. It was born at the cross, and you will get it back again if you go to the cross, just as you went at the first, and stand there, with this as your soul's confession of faith—

*“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”*

I cannot say more except just this—if God is prospering you, keep very close to the cross. Do you not see that if the richer you get, the oftener you go to the cross, it will be safe for you to be trusted with wealth? Take care to sanctify everything that God gives you by giving Him His proper portion, and do not use your own portion till you have given Him His. Then, if you look at every blessing as coming to you by the way of the cross and say, “Jesus Christ has sent me this, for—

*“‘There’s ne’er a gift His hand bestows
But cost His heart a groan,’”—*

if you receive everything as through Him, and then desire to use everything for Him, you may be as rich as the Rothschilds and yet you may be as gracious as the apostle Paul. You might have all the world given you, and yet, for all that, it would not hurt you. If you had as much of God as you had of gold, God would see that the gold was safe in your hands. He would trust us with prosperity if He saw that all our prosperity only bound us more closely and more completely to the cross of His dear Son. So, if any of you have forgotten Him, conclude this evening's service by coming to the cross, and thus Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shall get glory from you. May it be so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

HOSEA 13:1-9

Hosea was full of complaints against the people of God, for in his day, they had very sadly wandered from the Lord. They had even forgotten Him. In Hosea's prophecy we have the plaintive voice of a loving God chiding His backsliding children.

Verse 1. *When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.*

A modest, humble, trembling heart is often by far the sounder heart, but when we begin to sin, and to sin boastfully, and to wrap ourselves about with the robe of self-complacency, then is death very near to us, “When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.”

2. *And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the word of the craftsmen: they say of them, let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.*

When Jeroboam became king of the new kingdom of Israel—in order to prevent his subjects from going to Jerusalem to worship God in Solomon's temple—he started two shrines at Dan and Bethel, and there he set up what Holy Scripture calls in derision, “calves.” I suppose that his idea was to make images of a bull, the emblem of power, intending them to be the symbol of the Divine Being, and that the people intended still to worship God, but to worship Him under the image of a bull.

It is the same in Roman Catholicism to this day—the worship of God, the worship of Christ, by means of crucifixes, and emblems and symbols of various kinds. But when men once begin that kind of idolatry, there is no knowing where they will stop, for the worship of God through the medium of

symbols, soon grows into the worship of other gods. Saints and saintesses, “blessed virgins” and I know not what besides, are pretty sure to be set up when once people begin to make use of outward and visible emblems of the deity. So it was with these ancient Israelites. From worshipping the bull, which was meant to be a type of the omnipotent God, they went on to the worshipping of “molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding.”

Brethren, let us take warning from these idolaters, and always keep to the simplicity of worship ordained by God in His Word. However comely and beautiful, or grand and imposing, and consequently, fascinating, any form of idolatry may be to some minds, let us utterly despise it if it is not according to the mind of God, and the teaching of His Spirit, as revealed in His Word.

3. *Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*

Those who will have gods of their own making shall have but a brief enjoyment of them. He who truly worships the everlasting God shall have an everlasting blessing, but he who worships gods that he has himself made—mere objects of this mortal day, shall have but a short day of it. He shall be as the early dew, which glistens brightly, but is soon gone, or as the morning cloud, which is banished by the rising of the sun.

4-5. *Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no Saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*

The Israelites drew near to God when they needed bread and water in the wilderness. God says, “I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought,” and the Lord might say to His people nowadays, “I did know you when you were very sick, when you were very poor, when you were in great trouble. You sought me then, how is it that you are trying to do without Me now?”

6-8. *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.*

When men forget God, they may expect that they will meet with some terrible judgments, and God’s own people especially will find this to be the case with them if they forget the Lord. Our God is a very jealous God, and when His children will set their hearts on other objects instead of upon Himself, He will take care to embitter those objects of their affection to them, He will make their idols to be loathed by them.

If God did not love us very much, He would think little of our faults, but just because He loves us so much, He cannot bear that any part of our heart’s affection should go away from Himself. So, if He sees that we deal unfaithfully with Him, He will make us realize that sin is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing. His anger against us will be like that of a bear that is robbed of her whelps, or of a lion or leopard leaping upon his prey.

9. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.*

“You have gone away from Me, but I will bring you back again. You have destroyed yourself by your sin, but I will restore you to My favor by My grace. You may look within yourself for causes of repentance, but you must not look to yourself for the means of restoration, you must look to Me, your Savior and your God.” So this verse teaches us, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.